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C O N F I D E N T I A L RANGOON 000412

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [ENRG](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [RS](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: BURMESE-RUSSIAN NUCLEAR REACTOR PROJECT

Classified By: COM CARMEN MARTINEZ FOR REASONS 1.5 (B/D).

1. (C) In a March 24 conversation, the Russian ambassador in Rangoon, Oleg Kabanov, told the COM that he had met with the Burmese Minister of Science and Technology, U Thaug, on March 23 and discussed the status of the proposed Burmese-Russian nuclear reactor project that has been hanging fire, according to Kabanov, "for at least four years." Kabanov said that he asked the Minister if the GOB intended to proceed with the nuclear project or to cancel it completely as there has been no formal agreement signed between Burma and Russia nor has there been any indication that the GOB has any fiscal resources to dedicate to the project. Kabanov said the Minister assured him that the GOB did not want to cancel the project although there was currently no funding for it.

2. (C) Kabanov said that it was apparent to him that the GOB had never fully understood the commitment, in terms of time, money and personnel resources, required for the project. He said that someone "probably gave the idea to Senior General Than Shwe and he liked it because having a reactor would give the country international prestige" but now no one wanted to tell the Senior General that the idea should be abandoned as it would be a case of "kill the messenger."

3. (C) Kabanov said that he had never seen any progress on the project in his two and a half years in Rangoon, and did not expect to see any during his tenure. He said that in any case, the Russian government would insist on Burmese nuclear technicians working under Russian supervision and in accordance with IAEA standards for such a project. According to Kabanov, the GOB wants a reactor to produce isotopes for medical and agricultural purposes (for irradiating seeds to increase yield).

4. (C) Kabanov also said that there were about 1,000 Burmese studying in Russia, in a wide variety of fields. Some are studying nuclear technology, but the majority are scattered among a variety of disciplines.

5. (C) Comment: This conversation with Kabanov reiterated what he has said previously regarding Russia - Burma nuclear cooperation. He remains consistent and insistent in his statements that the GOR considers the issue stalled for now and for the near future. End comment.

Martinez